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THE STUDY OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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ROLF HENKL
PROFESSOR, KABUL UNIVERSITY

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THE STUDY OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Three Lectures for the University of Calcutta, delivered December 1949 and January 1950.

Comparative literature is a field of study for the lover of books—for the one who finds life supremely expressed in literature—and indeed an exciting love it is, to live with books old or new, and to be addressed by the Great, either departed or contemporary, as if they were in your presence and your brothers in spirit.

It cannot be denied that written thought—either in words or in symbols—is the highest expression of thought in a material way.* Writing and only writing made civilisation finally possible, and moreover, serves as essential support for its continuation. Although it was preceded by the other arts—painting, sculpture, the dance and music, as well as astronomy—they can never, though great in themselves, become its rivals, for the obvious reason of their limitation; or, if you want it this way, because the possibility of interpretation is, in their case, too wide for common agreement.

Many curious cases of extreme inclination towards literary works are known to history—men

* That is, fixed in a material medium, excluding, of course, oral tradition (which precedes all literature).

who knew all Homer, Marcus Aurelius, Dante or Faust by heart, not to mention those who could recite great parts of the Koran, the Bible, the Vedas, the Pali Kanon or other religious works. Truly the Renaissance artists who represented the Arts as Goddesses holding a stylus, a lyre, etc., had something to say beyond the cloak of convention. But true to the Turkish proverb: "Beware of him who has read only one book"— we are not looking for those enamoured of one work, but of many. Only to love and inclination, not to dry intellectual approach, will our secrets of literature be known.

The Governor-General of India, Mr. Rajagopalachari, seems, incidentally, to be an ardent student of comparative literature. In his speech on educational problems in Bombay on August 8th, 1949, he said: "When straying from my studies prescribed for me when I was young, I read Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," and chapters of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, and later I acquainted myself with the thoughts of Socrates, Marcus Aurelius and Brother Lawrence. The joy and reverence within me swelled towards the Upanishads, the Gita and the Mahabharata, though no one incited me to it. All spiritual search is one and God blesses it wherever it is done and by whomsoever. If I am today a devout though very imperfect Hindu Vedantin, it is not less due to my contact with some of the sacred books of other people, than to the contemplation of what our own great ancestors have left to us. Not by total exclusion

of all religion and spiritual thought, but by all-embracing acquaintance and appreciation of spiritual thought of all kinds shall we be safe and shape ourselves." I think these words give the essentials of our problem in a nutshell. No better quotation could stand at the opening of this lecture. It seems, of course, one of the secrets of education to give to students what they like, while we all of the older generation had, in our youth, to swallow a lot of things we did not find palatable, and we had to read the great books not within, but outside the program. Education *has* improved.

Taking "*literature*" *then, to mean poetry and fiction* and to some extent also philosophical, sociological, historical, religious and political writings, as well as ancient inscriptions and related material, it is evident that studies, aiming at a deepening of understanding by comparison of literary achievements, are carried on in many universities and institutions of learning. Radio, film and even writing for television are already treated as sections of literature in American Universities, and certainly furnish a new field for research. Perhaps the Indian film magnates or the radio people would found a chair. Money spent in research comes back multifold.

The most common form of comparative research in literature is *contemplation of one's own national production*, or sections of it, and comparison with the books of one or more foreign countries. From the drawing of conclusions, one's own national literary life generally is

supposed to profit to some extent—if indeed creative ability ever takes advice—or insight into one's own national literary creations is supposed to be deepened. The full enjoyment of art—be it expressed in letters or otherwise—is, indeed hardly possible without *supernational* comparisons. The column, erected in our own city, would mean more to us if we knew something about Trajan's column or the Needle of Cleopatra, or the exclamation of Napoleon's mother: "The Emperor is back again in the middle of Paris," when his statue was replaced on the top of the column of the Place Vendôme.

What, then, are the *tools and methods of study* of comparative literature? General study of "Literature" at the Universities is seldom more than explanation of foreign text. Indeed, no general understanding exists as to the proper methods of research. Uniformity, perhaps, would not be desirable. But even with regard to the aims of the whole enterprise, no general understanding exists. Certain writers indulge in pointing out the divergencies of literary structures and conceptions, while others point out common and linking characteristics. Very few writers, if any, have gone beyond this boundary.

One of the foremost tools to be applied is, of course, *the knowledge of languages*; *one's own*, naturally, but, in no less degree, related and even *distant foreign tongues*. Hence the necessity of *intensive linguistic studies*, of *research in language teaching*, of creation of *advanced linguistic institutes on the post-graduate level* (which are still rare in

comparison with those for language teaching on lower levels, *e.g.*, in primary and secondary education). There is a lack of good books on and *research into comparative grammar*, and into style and principles of *translation work* as well : we need improvement in *grammar* and *dictionary-making*, in the collection of *idioms*, in the diffusion of the *knowledge of phonetics* and the *principles of prosody*. All these are auxiliary tools and branches of literature teaching, which could keep a number of researchers busy and produce a good many doctors' theses more valuable than those generally found shelved in our libraries.

As to *methods*, we are deprived of the many possibilities which are at the disposal of a student of the exact sciences, and our only experimentation can be to investigate new literary movements or to group production in new ways and to apply our thinking as light beams and magnifying device, but this is an extremely wide, even inexhaustible field. We also have a very wide scope for *observation*, for *psychological*, *historical*, *sociological and philosophical* method, and for *aesthetic* and *ethical contemplation*. Phenomena in science must often be artificially created, and are observed with the help of instruments finer than human senses ; while in literature phenomena lie open before our eyes, but their observation is particularly difficult, as we deal with the manifestation of art, where personal taste prevails. It is a symptom of lack of critical ability to over-emphasize adverse points and to omit or overlook others. Only one who is reliable as an impartial observer is fit to be

a teacher of comparative literature. It is difficult to observe correctly, as many individual qualities enter into the execution of this task. I recall in this connection interesting experiments carried out in the Faculty of Law of Vienna University. Their purpose was to demonstrate the utter lack of reliability of witnesses. The Professor-in-charge had previously arranged with two students to disturb his lecture by heckling, to assail him personally, and finally to be thrown out by the guards. Everything they had to say and to do was written down beforehand and memorized, and the whole scene was as carefully rehearsed as one on the stage. It was then carried out to the letter in presence of a full auditorium in one of the professor's lectures on criminal law. As soon as quiet was restored, the professor proceeded to call forward as witnesses some of the students present, and took down their descriptions of the scene with all details of what was said and done. It was interesting to see how far the various descriptions of the event differed from reality! Of course, works of literature are not a fleeting, but a permanent impression; still, to observe well is a formidable task, and sympathies and antipathies of all kinds have to be overcome in order to make it unbiased and scientific. No complete evaluation of literary achievement can be made without natural ability, let alone proper training in the traditions of a great culture and great men of letters. As to sympathies involved, we must not forget that comparative literature should not be allowed to degenerate into production of polemics, as was done in the Nazi-

Universities, where prizes were given to one who, for example, could prove in a "Kampfschrift" by comparison of English literature with that of other nations that the British were evil and base! Comparative literature is and remains a science.

When we look thus at the *belles lettres* production of those great nations who possess a complete literary edifice from the time of the origin of writing up to the present—that is, the great peoples of the Euro-Asiatic Continent, or of the great circles of culture, as Toynbee the historical morphologist understands them—we clearly distinguish a general trend of development. Outer form and inner meaning are most intimately connected in literature, which gives importance to *morphology*. (Indeed there is no treatise yet on the general morphology of literary expression and its bearing on content; though such work would rather fall into the field of aesthetics, than of comparative literature.) Blossoming and wilting, new creation and decay of art within the civilized period of life on earth are best defined in terms borrowed from architecture: *primitive*—or aboriginal, if the meaning of this word be taken in its literary sense, *i.e.*, ab-original, from the origin; *classic*, which represents maturity, balance, roundness; *gothic*—a change of style leading to the cult of spiritual life, turning from the dark forces towards heaven in overwhelming desire to be redeemed—pinnacles and uplifts; *Renaissance*, rebirth of classic ideals (any developed art, indeed, oscillates between the classic and the gothic); and finally, the slight but pleasant degeneration into pompous, effect seeking *Baroque*

and playful overcharged *Roccoco*, followed, again, scheme of *classic*, *romantic* and *primitive* style. I quote Hodin :

This is the eternal circle, conceived by J. P. Hodin (in his paper : " Expressionism,"— Horizon, January, 1949), in the somewhat similar scheme of the *classic*, the *romantic* and the *primitive* style. I quote Hodin :

" When we investigate the elements characterizing the different styles, we can make the following statements about the classic. The *grouping* in the picture is symmetrical and counterbalanced ; the *structure* is composite (the individual components remain distinct, *e.g.*, architecture, landscape, figures) ; *colour* is based on the contrast of light and shadow ; the various components overlap each other to some extent in their *spatial distribution ; extension* is three-dimensional (geometrical perspective) ; the *line* tends to be intersected ; the *rhythm* is determined by an angular system. As regards *movement*, classic art is static, balanced and harmonious ; the *formative will* is constructive, the *state of mind* is a conscious one.

The romantic style shows asymmetry and torsion (rhythmic sinuosities) in the *grouping* ; in *structure* the interpenetration of the various pictorial elements ; in *colour* it is opalescent, iridescent ; in *spatial distribution* the various components cross each other ; *extension* is four-dimensional (three dimensions in space with one psychological or religious dimension extending into the infinite, the eternal) ; the *line* is violent and

varied; the *rhythm* is conditioned by the intersections and interweavings. As regards *movement*, the romantic style is dynamic, unbalanced, ecstatic, disharmonious; the *formative will* is complicated (in our period destructive—distortions); the artist's *state of mind* is influenced by the subconscious (in our period particularly by negative feelings, such as fear and despair). If the seventeenth-century baroque had faith, the romantic movement in present-day art is agnostic and solipsistic as a protest against our time itself, and neurotic as well. It is like a cry of despair, a revolt that often oversteps the borderline between the normal and the abnormal.

The primitive style has symmetry in the *grouping*; the *structure* is simple; the *colour* is even and strong; the *distribution in space* parallel or radiating; the *extension* two-dimensional, the *line* continuous, the *rhythm* established by repetition, symmetry and parallelism. The element of *movement* is supplied by the narrative content. Among primitive peoples the *formative will* is governed by the magic and the hypnotic; in folk-art and in neo-primitivism it is conditioned by a naïve representational and play impulse."

These periods, of course, overlap sometimes, but any artistic or intellectual life seems to be bound to pass through these stages if it is kept alive for any length of time, and not exterminated prematurely by catastrophes of nature or politics. These stages follow each other with the same certainty as periods in our physical life, or as the stages of the fourfold transformation

of certain insects from egg into caterpillar, chrysalis and winged state. And so sure are we of these facts that we would not hesitate to base conclusions on them. If, for instance, we should discover today a new, hitherto unknown civilization, preserved in ice or clay; if the mythical Atlantis should suddenly become accessible by the invention of a diving contraption opening the bathysphere to mankind, and we beheld a mixture of remains, which, within their own world of forms, could be called Baroque-like, we could very well base our research on the assumption that the Baroque stage, being last in line of development, must have preceded the destruction of this civilisation. Of course, as I pointed out before, some periods overlap, or now and then development is forced and proceeds by sudden jumps—*natura facit saltus*! and, in fact, some insects pass through three stages of development. But these exceptions only prove the rule.

We see thus the basic material of our research conveniently grouped into *periods*, and unwittingly admit one of their most striking characteristics, which is their supernatural character. The Rococo-style, for instance, is not confined to France, although it evokes first in most of us pictures by Watteau and court ladies in powdered wigs. Rococo art is found equally in Vienna, London, Rome; there is a paper to prove the presence of Rococo essentials in the Mahayana art of Nara (the old Japanese art centre), and the offshoots of Gandhara art in the Buddhistic caves of Afghanistan show unmistakable Rococo traits.

At the entrance to the literary structure of the complete civilizations* invariably stands a great epic and religious work, the prototype of which is the *Vedas*, reciprocated (if not offshoots from the same hidden source) by the old nordic *Edda*, the myths of *Hesiod* and *Homer*. One may find parallels (perhaps unrelated, though Prof. Kunze in Nagoya tries to prove the connection of Chinese writing and language with Aryan antiquity)† in the "*Nihongi*," the Japanese chronicle said to date from the "*time of the Gods*," the tales of the *Toltecs* (the predecessors of the Aztecs in Central America), the *Hebrew* books, *the Gilgamesh* tale, the *Koran*. And little does it matter, whether the epic in question is the work of a single writer, like the Koran, or of a very large group of priestly poets and seers, like the Vedas. Indeed, authorship, or the very existence of an author, is in the case of the ancient epics often disputed by the foremost scientific authorities of our days, as in the case of Homeros. In spite of countless ponderous volumes of research, it is not established whether there was a blind bard who wrote in hexameters stories of the Aegean and the Ionian and we can but say that all bards at the beginnings of civilizations were "blind seers" inspired by the gods!

* *I.e.*, those which, according to Toynbee, had their full circle of development, from the primitive to the classic and the decay-stage, without being artificially interrupted.

† The author has recently found in the early Sinaitic Aramaic and other Near-Eastern alphabets signs very near to, if not identical with, the Japanese "Kana."

What is *our real aim behind the grouping or comparing of books*, ancient or modern, in this way? Manifestly little can be achieved by pointing out *differences* in literary conception or *even common points:* our goal must be to produce new thought, or a blend of thoughts : *synthesis* must be our aim. As we have seen from the classification of literary works into periods, a very profitable line of approach is the forming of groups from works of various languages. Fortunately there is no mongrel literature yet; such hybrids as Pidgin English, Koschemer Loschen, Esperanto, Volapuek and Basic English have not the strength to create literatures. There are two preconditions for the creation of a synthetic view : *translation into and poetic reproduction* in one's own language, and *classifying books as members of certain groups.* While, generally speaking, one studies one book only, we have reached the stage in which we line books up and penetrate them as a mass. That seems already to be a general literary symptom nowadays. I was, for instance, astonished to hear, a few days ago in the train, from a fellow traveller about a book purporting to trace the phenomena of the 2nd World War from literature which appeared in the previous decade. I advised him jokingly, to read well books coming to him *now*, as they might contain all information on the next war and that might be *vital* information!

Translation work is—we have to realize that—only in its beginnings. *Dictionaries* often fail to distinguish rare and noble layers of words. The

richest translation literature is that in the German language, closely followed by English; translation work in other languages, including that of the highly civilized Romanic nations, lags far behind. How many very cultured nations of Asia lack translations of foreign standard literature into the vernacular, while they do not seem to lack translations of sensational new books. They ought to be provided with such translations. One of the duties of a chair of comparative literature would be, to guide editors in this direction. I do not belong, of course, to the pessimists who maintain that proper translation, especially of poetry, is impossible. Everything conceived by the human soul can be recast beautifully in another tongue—if the new medium is not too poor in vocabulary. As nobody, not even a scientist, can learn all or even only the most important languages on earth, we ought to put up with a few flaws of translation, otherwise we miss too much. The only thing we can do, is, to train better translators and to select the best among them and put them to great tasks. Do not forget, that the Noble Prize was given to Rabindranath Tagore when his poems were submitted in Stockholm in translation (into German); and it is said that one who can read English or German, has access to almost anything of importance written under the sun. Multiply translations from living and dead languages as well, if you wish to gain a synthetic view of literature. Fight restrictions on reading anything which must be qualified as a work of art.

As to the second step, the *forming of comparative groups*, the possibilities of this method are enormous and inexhaustible. I can but attempt to give a very sketchy introduction to it within the frame of this lecture.

One could, for instance, line up *the great epic works*, as Dante's Divine Comedy, Klopstock's Messias, Milton's Paradise Lost, Balzac's Human Comedy, and recognize them, despite their being created in different times, as gothic, and thus win new and deep insight into the steep and slender uplift of gothic thought; one could compare Anacreon, Omar the Tent-Mender and Li-Tai-Pe, and evolve a new *philosophy of worldly life*; the great modern *family romance* awaits a writer who can compare Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga, Thomas Mann's Buddenbrocks, Sigrid Unset's Christiane Lavransdotter, and Daphne du Maurier's novels, thus obtaining more insight into modern social forms; one could compare the ancient Greek lyrics, Rilke and Tagore and investigate what *lyric expression really means* to mankind; the *warrior epics*, like the Song of the Nibelungs, the Ramayana, the "Tale of the 47 Ronin" show similar traits, which explain to us the essential roots of heroism; the *deliverance legend* embodied in Hiawatha, in the White Saviour of the Mexicans, the Mithras mysteries Attys the Phrygian Spring God, the Bodhisattvas, and Yinas up to the texts of Richard Wagner's operas and even with the Karens of Burma in their tale of the Lost White Brother, who is to return one day and bring them a lost book, could appear before us for investigation. In

a thousand ways, modern life is influenced by those books and the manifestations they represent.

Mythology—international mythology, if I may say so—is another subject presenting a great number of similiar features, which we should experimentally superimpose, as were by a magazine editor certain pictures of American leaders, which, photographed one on another, produced a Sioux chief's face. If we could proceed similarly with mythological information from Patagonia to Mamtchatka, made transparent to us by prehistorical, anthropological and psychoanalytical discoveries, we would doubtlessly recognize the face of our race in its youth and its original nature-philosophy, and would perhaps find it even possible to create a present-day mythology; the *roots of a mythology* of the age of iron and electricity can already be found in the works of Franz Kafka, Mombert, Stucken, Verhaeren, Whitman, Ezra Pound, and in the work of sculptors and aesthetics like Barlach and Carl Einstein ("Negro Art").

We have by no means reached the end of possible subjects and ways of approach. Instead of comparing various different writers, we could also investigate the *reaction* to the works of *one writer in different countries*, as a contribution to receptional psychology. In the introduction to the "Anthology of the 20th Century," in which I collaborated, for instance, are given 4 translations of Rimbaud's famous poem "The Sleeper in the Valley," and carefully analysed side by side with

the original text. This is not the first experiment of this kind; I recall in this connection the story regarding "La Cruch Cassee," the broken jug: three works, each under the same title were written in a humorous literary competition by young Wieland, Kleist and Zschokke. These three friends, who all became later on famous in the history of literature, saw in 1801 in somebody's house an old picture on the wall, showing a girl and her lover with a broken jug before an austere old judge, and decided in a hilarious mood, that each of them should write a story or a play explaining the picture. The result enriched German and international literature alike.

Lovers of the huge literature dealing with technical subjects will perhaps enjoy a comparison and analysis of all *novels dealing with a voyage to the moon* (which the next generation most probably will see realized, though I do not see how the happiness of mankind can be much increased by technical progress of this type). Such novels have been written by Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Count Alexey Tolstoi, and a score of lesser lights, and one could draw from them conclusions about the eternal romantic inclination of the human soul, our gift for invention and our desire to conquer space through ideas.

One of the most helpful new sciences, which aims to further human happiness, is sociology, and if one would write a "*History of Utopian Writings*" from Plato and Thomas Morus to Aage Madelung ("Zirkus Mensch"), one could enrich sociology and political science alike.

There is hardly a great capital in the world, in which is not found at least *one periodical* dealing exclusively with modern literature. An excellent review which was, unfortunately, suppressed by the tragic political changes in Germany, was " Die Literarische Welt " (The Literary World) in Berlin, a weekly which abounded in good contributions. My eye was once caught there by an article entitled : " Liquid Excretions of the Body in Modern Lyrics,"—a striking and almost unbelievable title ; but when I studied the article, I found such an impressive array of quotations from the most famous writers of our times, such as, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Rilke, Maeterlink, George, and many others, that I gave in. Blood and tears are easily mentioned—see Mr. Winston Churchill—but that industrial age poetry deals frequently with sperm, pus and all other excretions, was somewhat new to me, and taught me that poetry has taken part in the liberation of mankind from inhibitions, which fettered us and our speech in Victorian times, and that the power of the word is capable of transplanting even things animal into the kingdom of spirit unlimited.

There was also an interesting, if not comical, paper entitled : "What Do the Illiterates Read?"—and they certainly do read a lot—try to investigate yourself !

A chair of comparative literature in this country should endeavour to promote literary periodicals, or work with them in close co-operation.

Of great value is also the *psychological approach*. The literature of the ancients was not

psychological. Our beginnings were mystic, folklorist, mythological, philosophical; the intellectual powers of young nations, astonished at the avenues of possibility opened by the invention of script, awoke to the *true philosophical state of mind*, in which every manifestation of the ordinary is seen as a phenomenon: but these manifestations were so impressive, that they remained for a long time the only source of inspiration. Later on, literature became descriptive. Not until transformation of the world by inventions and discoveries set in, could it become psychological. If the modern Cassandra, Mr. Aldous Huxley, is right, and we are driving towards a state of society resembling the bee-hive or the ant-hill, it looks as if any literature in future would be bound to be psychological. People do not desire betterment of their situation if they don't know anything better. In Hauptmann's drama "The Bow of Odysseus," the old feeble father of the hero, when informed that a festival would be held and he be invited to partake of better food than his ordinary fare, answers: "Was Besseres mag ich nicht" (Something better—that's what I don't want"). The aim of propagandistic literature and schooling must be, to make a given state of affairs appear as the climax of the desirable and achievable. Alas, we of the old generation come from an individualistic period, and to us a society, specially bred to make even inner defection impossible, must appear worse than death. We prefer the abysses and gothic pinnacles of mind to the peace in the soul of the bee, which is specially bred to feel nothing but content-

ment in her never-ending round of work and procreation. Happiness can only be a deeper feeling and viewing of the world, and can ripen only if it stems from instability and extremes. Intellectual greatness can arise only from individualism.

In a process comparable to the "Theocrasia"* of Hellenistic times—that is, the blending of Gods, like identification of Zeus, Jupiter, Mithras, Ormuzd, if not Jehovah, with Serapis—in such a process we shall endeavour to group literary works and to compare them with a view to obtaining common features (including common divergencies from our national viewpoints) and proceed to the formation of a synthesis, which will teach us more about our own psychology, the reflection of which is literature.

While we have so far taken as the object of our researches the comparison of thought in various countries, including our own, there is, of course, a more detached study possible, which we may call one-track-investigation. Results so far obtained must be compared with things *within our own intellectual precinct.* For instance, a competitive group could receive the assignment to work out a study in "*Types of French Thought,*" of "*German Thought,*" of "*Medieval Life and Thought.*" It stands to reason that this very approach will furnish a filtration through and a comparison with, our own type of mind.

* Not to be confounded with "Theocracy," but coming from Theos and Krasis, mixture.

A paper on "*Types of Oriental Thought*" will be very revealing to the occidental student, and not less to the oriental, who is not accustomed to call himself oriental, but might be astonished to see in terms clearer than personal feelings, what *distances* him from the Western world, and what *joins* him to the neighbouring Asiatic countries.

A study which would take the person undertaking it from the very ancient texts up to the very modern, would be a comprehensive study of the "*Nature Writers*," who might be subdivided into poets and scientists, to the first group belonging Virgil, and kindred poets who delighted in description of nature (Idyllica and Bucolica), and to the second, those who explore nature, like Aristotle, Linné, Darwin, Audubon.

Political changes, alas, and not political stability, seem to be the core of life to some writers. Why not, then, study the general pattern along which *revolutionary thought* moves, brightened by the sacrifices of the greatest of mankind, and deal with—as Prof. Herbert F. West says—"the ideas of a cosmopolitan group of thinkers, who were intellectual or spiritual rebels by nature, and their influence on contemporary life and thought," (which is still very strong in many instances, although the man in the street might not recognise which factor turns his little life upside down): Socrates, Christ, Machiavelli, Bruno, Swedenborg, Byron, Heine, Leopardi, Tolstoi, Strindberg.—especially in his "Road to Damascus"—and Romain Rolland. We might

BCU 2989

also single out for our purposes the *masters of the modern novel*—since this seems to be the type of literary creation predominant now-a-days over any other form—and study Dostoevsky, Joyce, Kafka, Thomas Mann, Werfel. Desire to seek an understanding of the main tendencies of thinking, which have brought about contemporary ideas, and which are still fermenting in our modern world, in economics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, criticism, might lead us to study Marx, Gobineau, Croce, Unamuno, Freud, Bergson, Spengler, Spencer, and Santayana, while the lover of *biography*, a very special creation of modern times, which greatly outdistances Plutarch, might line up the books written on Echn-Aton, Buddha, Confucius, Alexander, Voltaire, Leonardo da Vinci, Garibaldi, Pasteur, van Gogh, Masaryk, Mussolini, Cromwell and Sun Yat Sen. He might even attempt to assemble various biographies, dealing with *one* famous man, and to bring out—not the never attainable historic truth, but the deeper principles below the kaleidoscopic changes which the subject of these biographies undergoes before our eyes; and connoisseurs of history would enjoy a study of the books dealing with great *female personalities*, like Sappho, Katherine de Medici, Maria Theresa of Austria and Marie Antoinette of France, or to write a treatise on the correspondence of famous personalities of *the opposite sex*, as Paul and Virginie, Abélard and Héloise.

Nor is *war* barren of *poetry*, in spite of the supposition that literature flourishes only in un-

161,400

broken periods of peace (for which there seems to be evidence in the great literary void during the Second World War). If we compare war poetry of ancient times with such poetry as war creates now-a-days (Dix, Seen in the Trenches; the Poppies of Flanders, and so on) we could draw perhaps a number of extremely interesting conclusions about cultural advances and retrogressions in relation to technical inventions, for which statisticians might furnish a very menacing graph. When people fought with the sword, poetry reflecting their deeds was grand indeed; when they bump each other off through the telescopic sight, the poetical harvest is very small, if we subtract the horrid and the sentimental to which the ancients gave little space.

Turning from war like to the idyllic, if we compare the old parks of Florence and Rome, or the poetic life of the *ancients in their gardens*, with present day blocks of flats, we shall find that one of the chief sources of happiness on earth, nature, is neglected now-a-days. Setting ourselves, however, another theme, *Beauty in Things Technical*, we find that it was not given to the ancients to see beauty in such machinery and industry as they possessed (and on no mean scale, mind that), while to our mind the many-coloured mysteries of chemistry, the mighty droning of aircraft and the white steam plume of the locomotive are sources of inspiration, and Zola, Meunier and Verhaeren discover beauty in collieries and factory yards.

You see, we suffer from no lack of possibilities to make up our program of study. Comparative

Literature reaches out into Sociology and Psychology; we started to look at it as a subdivision of general study of literature and perceive that it is a part, perhaps destined to overshadow its origin through a turn of the modern mind and to drive certain branches of learning into ancillary positions.

Another very wide field of investigation—which of course, overlaps with purely aesthetical research and literature about art,—*is comparison of literary technique*, in order to determine the most advanced techniques as applied by the great masters of the pen. A criterion of literary capacity is, for instance, the description of a person. How does Ovid describe Narcissus, whose spectre haunts the books on psychoanalysis? How does Balzac describe the Abbess? Harvey Allen the King of Spain? Thomas Mann the Lady von Rinnlingen? Do we find that the master writers of antiquity use a technique similar to that of "writers of the dernier cri?" It would be an interesting contribution to psychology, if someone proved that subjects for description have broadened, but technique has remained the same since early ages. Writers, old and modern, rarely describe anything of a person except the face; perhaps in some cases a few words about height, gait, dress, are attached. Has this way of painting a person through the medium of words thus become an accepted canon? Can we find among the expressionist writers noteworthy exceptions, or are their aberrations deceptive, only confirming the canon? I would take a rather personal interest in such an

investigation, as I vividly and still painfully remember having been reproached as a student by my teacher for devoting, in the description of a heavenly apparition, equal space to head and hands. Perhaps I unwittingly copied the ways of Egon Schiele, famous Viennese painter, who had a sort of mannerism in ochre dealing chiefly with a person's head and hands, the rest of the portrait existing only in shadow and outline. He was reproached by critics, though, for giving to everybody the same hands, typifying them, a fault, which he shares with Botticelli, Lucas Cranach and others.—Types of character are common in painting or sculpture, and can be found everywhere, from the pyramid painters to the Byzantines and the Kafirs of the Hindukush, as well as the sculptures of medieval Indian temples.—I could continue almost indefinitely the list of possible interesting and cultured themes, which may lead to definite contributions to psychology, social science, history, and understanding of the arts, and last, but not least, to enhancement of happiness, if we agree that education means capacity for enjoyment. I will add a few themes at random. What rôle does *winter* play in ancient and modern poetry? We have changed and enlarged our attitude towards the seasons. Winter was an icy demon to the ancients. To us it is the time when skiers— in Kashmir!—take a sun bath on snowy heights. Is it perhaps this change of attitude which leads to our desire to change systematically the climate of our environment, made possible, nowadays for

the first time in history, by atomic developments? That would link psychology and invention. The *conception of destiny* among the Greek tragedy writers has formed the subject of much discussion; how about the contemporaries? Is there an *ethos of expressionism*? What conception of destiny is held by Schalom Ash, Thomas Wolfe, John Dos Passos? Finally we should at least touch on a very large class of literature, not mentioned so far, and that is *literary criticism*. Do critics follow a certain pattern of approach, perhaps unconsciously? What is the value of literary criticism, and what results are obtained? To answer this clearly would be a task worth pursuing.

Another promising task would be the investigation of literary relationship between one's *own country* and any *given foreign nation*. This leads to valuable psychological data. How are we ourselves as others see us. Which of our national mirrored in the minds of the intelligentsia in the other country? This is of importance, because, according to the well known saying, we do not see traits, our achievements, our nationwide faults, loom large in the eyes of the other nation? Which of our great books are translated there? Which plays presented? (Perhaps one which had no success at all at home?) Were not some of our successful men accepted in their own country only after becoming famous abroad? Which of our songs have become current among the common people in the other country? Have any of our political ideas been copied? or any of our institutions, methods, industrial products received with

acclamation, expanded, improved upon? To know about this is, you all will concede, of no mean importance in an age of conscious foreign relations and life guided by applied psychology, so that not even a manufacturer of jam or toilet powder labels his product without consulting the trade psychologist first. Could we afford to be misrepresented in foreign eyes? Could we afford to neglect the study of the neighbour? We could not; we would have to mend our ways, and in this respect an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure. And have we done justice to foreign nations who have gladly, if not eagerly, absorbed our ideas? What do we think about them, and on what do we base our viewpoint? Let us sample the opinion of the best educated.

If we can declare ourselves quite satisfied with the impression we have made, some little errors, as in the spelling of our names or the like, do not matter, as long as we appear as a country of deep spiritual decisions and almost entirely influenced by intellectual motives.

If on the other hand, the result obtained should show, that we know very little about our neighbours who esteem us highly—then we must lay the blame before our own door and proceed to improve certain of our educational features. Greatness of spirit has nothing to do with extension in square miles. Small countries may not be inferior to big ones in spirit. We must learn, not only in order to profit, but because it is of deep significance to see how problems of this importance have been worked out on both sides of the boundary.

Surrealism, which originated in painting, and produced a number of little-known, but weighty writings, is another of those movements, which have marched around the globe, and left traces in Japan, India and elsewhere, thus furnishing a subject for comparative study. Surrealism is explained as the world of positivists and materialists, who decline transcendency and abhor metaphysics, finding the only source of the more-than-rational in the sub- and unconscious world, a realm which, through over-development of rationality during the last decades, has become an abandoned battle-field strewn with wreckage of dreams and suppressed thoughts, which perished on the glorious path to totality; this is the real reason why there is so much desolation, horror and abandonment in surrealistic art, but also why it is so strangely attractive to the contemporary soul. One feels that it wants to reform our splintered life, and to purify our inner world by a new contemplation. The spread of surrealism (and later existentialism) can be further compared with movements which held out—at least in their beginnings—a similar secret enticement, for instance, the Romantic Movement, the " Age of Enlightenment " (which spread to the United States and produced there milestones of social life like Beecher-Stowe's "Uncle Tom") and the Socialist Movement; our object being, of course, some section of the literature which these movements have produced in utopian and messianic vein.

You see that comparative literature is not a discipline in an ivory tower, far from the realities;

it stands in the midst of swirling problems of contemporary life.

After we have first given a definition of our subject and investigated the extent of our field of research; secondly, enumerated a great many useful ways of approach, and outlined the possibilities of papers and theses; it finally remains to investigate more closely the *technical set-up for studying* Comparative Literature systematically. An important precondition for the existence of such a department is a well endowed library. There must be a number of *books*, especially modern literary works, in various languages, and quite a number of them not in one copy, but in quantities which will permit providing groups of students with them—small groups, of course, as access to this field of study—with the exception of courses dealing with translation literature,—will necessarily be limited to those reading foreign languages—preferably at least two. For a few basic and more popular courses, there must be a vast treasure of *translation literature* on the shelves. It results thus, that the study of Comparative Literature must go hand in hand with the study of languages on the post-graduate level (and grown-up students learn much faster how to read, though not how to pronounce, foreign languages, than do younger students). In many universities which do not desire specialization along this line, the study of Comparative Literature and Linguistics fit together very well. A close co-operation with the departments of Comparative Philology, Philosophy, Comparative Religion, History of Art and

Architecture, Sociology or Social Thought, Dramatic Arts and English is imperative and will also facilitate the work of these departments, inasmuch as courses can be designed, which will bring credits wherever they fit in. A course in "*Recent Philosophy*," for instance, which would contemplate the works of Nietzsche, Mill, Spencer, Bergson and Santayana, is, by definition, equally a course in comparative literature. A department of *Comparative Religion* must necessarily study the sacred scriptures of India, Greece, Rome, Palestine, etc., a study which overlaps with our activity. Intelligent arrangement of courses can result in saving of time and of expenses for books, and in higher pay to the staff. No *department of dramatic arts* can avoid stepping into the realm of comparative literature; no matter whether they deal with ancient tragedy or television writing; what one has of stage literature at home is simply not enough. *A school of Journalism* cannot avoid studying the technique of foreign newspaper-men. The *History of Art*, and even of *architecture and applied arts*, by definition necessarily international, must proceed along the lines we have suggested. A course in *Sociology*, having, for instance, as its subject the problem of conflicts in modern civilization, forces and interests which make for individual, group, class, race and national strife (forces like democracy, nationalism, socialism, communism, fascism) evidently overlaps with our studies, as a comparative study of the literary origins of all these systems must be carried out. The study of *International Relations* cannot avoid borrowing

CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY CENTRAL LIBRARY.

from our department, and so must *Political Science*, which really is nothing but comparative history,—if there were such a subject. (So far, our studies of history have all been so comparative in nature, that the adjective comparative was dropped as if by common consent. Toynbee's works show a special impetus in this avenue of approach). If we go through the courses given in various *Departments of English*, we shall find many overlapping or even identical efforts. A course in a Department of English entitled "World Literature Since Dante" doubtlessly belongs to our subject. A course on "World Perspectives in Modern Literature" ought to be transferred from the Department of Philosophy to that of Comparative Literature (Authors investigated: Goethe, Wordsworth, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Yeats, Proust, Mann, Joyce); and if an officer of the university should hesitate in deciding whether a course of "Philosophies of History" (St. Augustine, Hegel, Marx, Spencer, Toynbee, Croce, Spengler) ought to be listed under philosophy, history or literature, I would suggest declaring that it belongs to Comparative Literature. A course on *intellectual history* must draw its main material from Comparative Literature, and "Foreign Literature in Translation" (courses in Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Greek, Roman, German, French, Italian, Scandinavian and Russian Literature) does not really belong to the Department of English, but Comparative Literature, as probably the purely English

part of the art of translation into English forms only a very small part of the course. Incidentally, people who know English, Spanish and Portuguese, can investigate a *foreign* literary group (those in the Americas, or in the mother country, respectively) without learning a foreign language. A border field is the study of *Scripts, Signs and Symbols*, which could be given in a "Department of Languages and Communication," listing, among others, Analytical and Historical English Grammar, Courses in Basic Principles of Language, and General Theory of Signs. Courses like "Analysis of Ideas and the Study of Methods," "Structure and Idea in the Novel," "Introduction to the Methods of Literary Study" and "Bibliography and the Techniques of Literary Scholarship" would be other possibilities.

How, then, would the curriculum for the study of Comparative Literature and Linguistics look? Let us design a tentative program.

(*a*) Comparative Literature, Courses of Study :

(tentative selection)

(1) General Principles of study of Comparative Literature. A course aiming to develop research work. Open to graduates only. Prerequisites: ability to read several languages.

(2) Masters of the Modern Novel. This course will study the modern novelists whose importance and influence is greatest. Dostoiewski, Proust, Joyce, Kafka, Mann.

(3) Types of Contemporary Thought. Aims to seek an understanding of the main tendencies in thinking which have brought about contemporary ideas and which are still fermenting in our modern world, in economics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, literature and criticism. Marx, Gobineau, Croce, Unamuno, Freud, Bergson, Spengler, Santayana, Tolstoy, Havelock Ellis.

(4) Types of Oriental Thought. Philosophical, social and religious ideas of China, Japan, India, as they appear on the background of modern westernized civilization. With readings in translations.

(5) Rebel Thought. Deals with a cosmopolitan group of thinkers who were intellectual or spiritual rebels by nature. Their influence on contemporary life and thought will be discussed. The need for such thinkers will be noted. Socrates, Christ, Macchiavelli, Cervantes, Bruno, Swedenborg, Shelley, Heine, Leopardi, Strindberg, Romain Rolland, Gandhi.

(6) The Sacred Scripts of the World. Analysis, common traits, divergencies, their influence on our daily life; ways in which collections of sacred texts have been formed in the past and are likely to be formed now and in the future.

(7) Contemporary Literature in translations. A survey of dramatic art and literature of the Germanic, Romanic, Slavonic languages in translation. Open to all students. No reading knowledge of a foreign language required.

(8) Great Historians and Reformers, from St. Augustin to Toynbee.

(9) Co-ordinating Course. Purpose to train major men and women in investigation and analysis of literary problems. Emphasis is laid on the question of principles and ramifications into related fields. A critical attitude is encouraged in the reading of relevant materials, writing of paper reports, and in class discussions. Analysis of ideas and study of methods in the Humanities.

Add here such courses as the instructors might suggest and faculty approve. Needless to say, any program of this type depends upon having a sufficient number of books and qualified instructors.

(*b*) Linguistics :

A. Lower Section (open to all students).

(1) Elementary.

(2) Intermediate : German, French, Russian, Italian, Spanish. (Add such languages as the faculty wishes to add.) English is not considered (except as furnishing examples in Phonetics and Morphology) as it is taught in the Department of English.

B. Higher Section (open to Graduates only).

(1) Advanced German, French, Italian, etc.

(2) Language. A survey of the Basic Principles of Language essential to students of the Humanities. Phonetics, Linguistic structure, Linguistic changes.

(3) General Phonetics. Symbols. Daniel Jones. Experimental Phonetics. Speech Clinic. Corrective Phonetics.

(4) Modern Principles of Language Teaching; Jespersen, Palmer, Michael West.

(5) Sound and Meaning in Language. Speech sounds in modern science; phonetics and phonemics, simultaneity and succession, typology, and geographical distribution; recent trends in linguistics.

(6) Morphology of Language; historical, analytical, comparative grammar. Morphology of Syntax.

(7) Advanced Composition and Phonetics in one of the languages mentioned above; study of phonetic texts.

(8) Scientific German. With special emphasis on medical and pharmaceutical terminology and its Greek and Latin sources.

(9) General Theory of Signs. A survey of types of script, including the principles of character writing.

(10) Apprentice teaching of languages.

(11) Rapid Reading Course. Improvement of Reading.

(12) General Survey of Division, History, Characteristics of Languages of the World.

The above program is extremely ambitious and does not fall short of any of the programs actually in execution in the great universities of the Atlantic world. The realization, again, depends upon the books and instructors available.

Naturally, the study of Comparative Literature must be supported by the section of *linguistics*, and this section in turn based on *graduate*, and farther down, *undergraduate language teaching* as

the lowest rung of the ladder. The lower sections —elementary and intermediate French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, etc. (not counting Asiatic languages, which, in the West at least, are generally assigned to Departments of "Oriental Studies") equally serve as steps within their own department, leading to the reading knowledge and technical language requirements for graduation in other departments. The higher sections are conducive to specialization. Where there are departments of French, German, etc., some of their courses can be listed in both departments and can bring credit in either of them. The more theoretical disciplines of Phonetics and Morphology aim at deepening the understanding of natural phenomena underlying speech (and thought, since words are frozen thought). Indeed, language is often wrongly considered artificial; speech and grammatical forms grow and are realized unconsciously.

The Section of Linguistics will also aim at a thorough training of language teachers. The belief, found all over the world, that anyone who can speak a language (and even sometimes not very well), can teach it, is an inexcusable mistake. The advertisement columns of our newspapers abound in advertisements of people who offer to teach us Russian, German, French, and what not, and very few of them are qualified for the job. We would not advance cash to someone purporting to fix our wiring, unless we could be sure beforehand that he was a qualified electrician. But we willingly pay housewifes and others, who take

some time off from their duties, to talk to us in a strange tongue. If the study of foreign languages can be improved at all, and in its train the study of foreign literature with all its intellectual consequences, we must improve the language teachers first. They should not set out on their task before knowing the basic facts of phonetics and morphology, of linguistic structure and linguistic changes. This, again, overlaps with Philology, so that some of our courses can have a double function.

The above program is, of course, a tentative one, and is capable of enlargement. As to the *elementary* and *intermediate language* courses, I have listed them summarily, but they occupy indeed a very large section of the program of most colleges and universities. Elementary courses are usually termed the " First Course " and the " Second Course," stretching over two academic years. In the United States, we find the useful arrangement of trisecting the academic year, and adding a summer school, thus obtaining a year divided into 4 quarters (Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer). Students are at liberty to holiday during the summer quarter, or to continue going to school, in which case they can do the curriculum for 2 years in six quarters,* that is, for instance, beginning in the autumn of one year and ending in the winter of the following year. Courses are arranged accordingly.

* Or the 4 years of College in 3 years.

A good definition of the aim of the department of foreign languages is: "To give the student a working knowledge of foreign languages for teaching, research, travel, business, diplomatic or government work and for graduate or undergraduate study of the civilization and literature of a foreign country." Adequate equipment must be present to permit the most recent and efficient methods of class work and discussion groups, the production of plays, broadcasting, etc. A "first course" aims at "correct pronunciation with a view to imparting eventually not only a reading knowledge of French (or whatever the language under discussion), but also the ability to use orally a certain number of current words, idiomatic expressions and grammatical forms, selected from standard lists. When feasible, students must meet in experimental sections for further practice in speaking the language." The "second course" claims to "stress the development of an extensive passive vocabulary based upon official frequency word counts, and the application of such vocabulary, of idiomatic expressions and grammatical forms to the reading of many stories." In addition there must be corrective work in pronunciation and conversational practice.—Intermediate courses in French, duplicated in all language fields, taken at random from curricular writings of larger schools, consist, for instance, of "Intermediate French Composition:" "A Survey of French Literature and Civilization" (including the newspaper): "French Literature" (from mediaeval times to the

18th century; 19th and 20th centuries); "French Civilisation" (the institutions of France, her art and letters, her people and human geography); "Advanced French Conversation" (based on current events and practical everyday social and business relations, as well as on topics of historical and cultural interest); "Advanced French Composition and Phonetics" (study of historical grammar, stylistics, synonyms and antonyms with the translation into French of increasingly difficult English texts; phonetics—both theoretical and practical, with emphasis on grouping of words, accentuation and intonation; finer points of diction acquired through recorded readings of great artists of the modern stage; speaking in class; dramatic presentation, etc.); "French Contemporary Novel"; "French Drama" (from the Théatre Libre to the present day); and finally, bordering on post-graduate work, "Old French Language and Literature," with a comprehensive study of the development of French sounds from the sounds of spoken Latin, and contributions of old French to English vocabulary; and "Study in the Problems of French Civilization," useful for those who plan to enter intelligence or diplomatic service. Needless to repeat, these courses can all be duplicated in the field of other languages; in German, we shall find an additional course in Scientific German, in Spanish a Survey of Spanish-American Literature and Civilization, and so on.

As to *Linguistics, Phonetics* and *General Philology*, some courses are outlined in our program above; they furnish a field of enticing studies;

indeed, they open our ear to a new comprehension of accoustics, to a new world of sounds, sometimes even to the point of obtaining too much and unwanted information; similar was the complaint of a famous graphologist, Raphael Scherman, to whom even scribbling on walls conveyed information as to the personality of the writer—so much so, that Scherman became loath to look at script, unless it was for professional purposes. The immortal phonetician in Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" is able to classify a person according to his (or her) pronunciation, even down to the London street where she was born! However, as our lecture deals with comparative literature, we cannot go farther into the field of linguistics at the present moment.

Some courses could be used to *enlarge the program* of our studies, or could be offered as a choice to instructors who would, for this reason or that, not feel at home in the courses listed: "*European Literature in Translations*: Dante, Montaigne, Flaubert, Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, Thos. Mann." "The Modern European Novel (since 1800): Balzac, Stendhal, Emily Brontë, Turgeniev, D. H. Lawrence, Gide, Proust, Malraux, France, Zola, Ibanez, Somerset Maughan, Mann, etc." "*Modern European Drama*: leading dramatists since 1870. Ibsen, Hauptmann, Strindberg, Chekhow, Brieux, Rostand, Maeterlinck, Gorki, Schnitzler, Molnar, Toller, Unruh, D'Annunzio, Pirandello, Shaw," "*Introduction to World Literature*: with illustrative readings." A course of this type offers a very wide scope to

the instructor, who is able to delve into all his beloved authors without restriction. "*Mutations of the Short Story*: this type of writing in ancient, mediaeval, and modern times." "*Biography*—which was mentioned in general terms before—a survey, with readings consisting of representative biographies from the times of Plutarch to Zweig's Marie Antoinette and Ludwig's "The Nile," and the development of biography as a type of literature." "*Modern Literary and Artistic Trends*: naturalism, neo-romanticism, impressionism, symbolism, expressionism, surrealistic art." "*Survey of Criticism in Literature and Art*: from the Greeks to Walter Pater, Kerr, Knickerbocker." "*Recent Books*: discussion of current publications with reference to their place in the history of literature and their importance to our times." "*Masterpieces of World Literature*: an introduction to world literature in translations, emphasizing the outstanding contributions of various nations, with specific consideration of the origin, transmission and significance of literary genres." "*The Historical Novel*: Walter Scott's "Waverley," Wallace's "Ben Hur," Bulwer Lytton's "The Last Days of Pompeii," Flaubert's "Salambo," etc., and their later influence on English and Continental writers." "*The Classical Tradition in Drama*: the Greek drama and its influence on modern writers."

Great are also the possibilities of working on general literary lines: to make, from a certain given viewpoint or with respect to a certain general or technical theory, a study of the artistic,

economic and psychological significance of representative literary works; of plot, characterisation, point of view and methods of expression, social situation, character delineation and technique of construction in literary works. "A Critical Study of the *Nobel Prize Awards in Literature*" would not make a bad doctor's thesis. "*The Language of Art*: discussion of how the literary vehicle assists the visual arts, *e.g.*, the technical terms contained in the writings of painters, sculptors, etc., as well as in books on art; artist's slang, and its influence on modern language, newspaper articles, daily conversation; the resulting enrichment of contemporary vocabulary." "*General Theory and Analysis of Literary Forms*: with examples from world literature showing delineation and inner construction of literary types." "*Contemporary Criticism of Poetry*: theory and practice, with readings from Rimbaud, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Rilke, Mombert, Werfel, Stefan George, Johannes R. Becher, the English symbolists." "*Literary Workshop*: branching out in an investigation of the essentials of poetry writing, the type of content that demands poetry as its medium of expression, technical elements, rhythm, tone colour, imagery." "*Disintegration and Rebirth*: modern writers that mark the social and political history of the past decades, the drastic political and economic upheavals, revolutionary disturbances, declared and undeclared wars, the unrest, the suffering, the protest, the questions and the answers of the period: Dreiser, Dos Passos, Wolfe, Hemmingway,

Asch, Conrad, Huxley, Joyce, Proust, Romains, Kafka, Feuchtwanger, Hamsun, Undest, and others." "*Interactions of Literary trends*: a general investigation of literary influence across political and continental borders, the course they run, the way they fertilize each other."

The whole essence of the comparative study of literature is given in the following *consideration*:

"The Department of Comparative Literature is organised with the purpose of arranging programs of study which differ from those offered in other departments of the divisions primarily in the circumstance that they approach the subject matter of literature and the arts from a comparative point of view. The comparison may be (1) between two or more particular literatures, ancient or modern, and the basis of study in that case may be either a single period, in which the literary productions of certain nations are considered with respect to their likeness, differences, interactions; or an important literary kind (*e.g.* tragedy, prose fiction, satire) which has been cultivated in different languages through successive ages; or an intellectual tradition (*e.g.* literary criticism or the theory of rhetoric or of history) which has similarly persisted through various literatures and times. Or again (2) a comparison may be effected between literature and other arts or disciplines either in terms of their theoretic interrelations (*e.g.* the connections between philosophy and the criticism of lyric poetry or the methods of history in different periods or literatures) or in terms of the mutual

influence of theory and practice (*e.g.* the influence of critical and philosophical ideas on historical methods and artistic forms or the cognizance of the latter revealed in the former) or in terms of their regional or temporal co-existence (*e.g.*, the relations of literature to painting, music, and the graphic or plastic arts and philosophy in the Italian Renaissance or in the Romantic period in Germany). Many comparative studies of these two main types are possible, and the main concern should be, that they should be conducted in such a way that *literature or art remains the dominant centre of interest* and that the interpretation of works is not reduced in any simple fashion to the illustration of any social processes or theories." If such a comparative study is to attain fruitful results it must be obviously more than a merely impressionistic, rhetorical or dogmatic consideration of great works; and it is essential, therefore, that it should be carried out by means of the technique and disciplines bearing on the interpretation of artistic works which are employed and taught in the departments of the faculty. Four disciplines are of particular importance, and it is expected that students working in the field of comparative literature will acquire, in different proportions or combinations, some competence in all of them. (1) The first requisite is an adequate training in linguistics both in the sense of being able to read the relevant original languages—this requirement will naturally vary for different degrees and different programs —and in the sense of a proficiency in analyzing

linguistic structures as these appear in literary works. (2) Students will also be expected to acquire some skill in the analytic disciplines of history in their bearing on literary and artistic development. Always essential for a properly rounded approach to literature or art, the possession of such skill assumes special importance at the present time in view of the common tendency of historians to fall into one or the other of two errors—the dogmatic statement of the characteristics of peoples or ages, and the equally dogmatic tracing of linear influences from abrupt or arbitrarily selected origins. (3) It is expected, again, that all students taking degrees in Comparative Literature will be able to demonstrate at least an elementary competence in analyzing arguments of various types and in tracing the history of ideas in so far as this is reflected in literature or art. (4) The chief interest, however, is that students should become proficient in the methods of interpretation or criticism relevant to the appreciation of works of literature or art—that they should be able to analyse those works as *artistic structures* and bring their analyses to bear on questions involving either the character, intentions, and circumstances of writers or the effects of works on audiences and readers. We do not assume that there is any proper mode of analysis for all artistic works or for all works of any particular kind, but expect the student not only to understand the principles determining the mode of analysis which he prefers or to which he is habituated, but also the peculiar nature and theoretic interrelations of all other

legitimate modes of analysis which may be set before him in his courses or in the critical or scholarly treatises he reads. The one qualification important is, that the competence in interpretation the student acquires, should be a competence pertinent to literature or art in the sense that the principles employed do not involve the necessary subordination of literary or artistic works or values to external ends such as politics or moral philosophy."

Although perhaps some researchers will disagree with certain finer points of this program, there is no doubt that it remains a short, but very comprehensive definition of the work expected in the discipline of comparative literature. *The possibilities of deviation into politics or moral philosophy are singled out as the most dangerous.*

Finally, before coming to more general contemplation, I wish to refer to some *applied* form of Comparative Literature, with which you all certainly have a nodding acquaintance, that is, the so-called search for the *Hundred Best Books*, a kind of scientific game, which keeps cropping up again and again in intellectual circles all over the world. The STATESMAN, Calcutta, carried in July, 1949, the following leading article :

THE HUNDRED BEST

" Superlatives call for cautious handling. At times they have led to legal action on charges of misrepresentation. Where physical measurement is possible all is easy; the largest, the heaviest, the

highest are capable of proof. Not so the best, the most beautiful, the shapeliest. It is they, who cause trouble. Recently a young woman in an English seaside town appealed to the Law in protest because some other young woman had been chosen as the town's most beautiful girl.

Nevertheless UNESCO, otherwise the United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, has decided to find, for translation into the chief world languages, the world's Hundred Best Books, in literature, philosophy, humanities, social and natural science. To this end it has invited member nations to make suggestions. India and Pakistan are presumably busy on this task. Britain has gone some way in it. The U.K. National Co-operating Body for Arts and Letters, on the files presumably UKNCBAL, has set up a Working Party, which term almost elevates literature, philosophy and science to the level of the cotton or leather industry; and this Party, composed of five distinguished men, has prepared a first list for wide circulation and comment before it is made final and sent to UNESCO. Students in this subcontinent, hitherto as a rule much interested in Britain's literature and science, may find a pleasant occupation for a leisure hour in seeing how nearly they can approach to the final list so determined. It is laid down that only classics are to be considered, a classic being defined as any work in any intellectual field which is deemed representative of a culture or a nation, and which remains a landmark in the cultural history of

mankind. For ease in applying this definition, since length of life is considered to be a characteristic of a classic, it was asked that nothing published later than 1900 should be proposed.

In the suggested list just published, Ireland comes in only through Gulliver's Travels, Scotland through Boswell, Burns in selections and Scott in The Heart of Midlothian. Philosophy offers Mill's On Liberty and nothing more, Science Darwin's Origin of Species. Shakespeare is in as a whole, but if selection is necessary neither Othello nor The Merchant of Venice is favoured. David Copperfield is thought to be enough of Dickens. Of the 23 authors named nine are poets, from Chaucer to Wordsworth. Tennyson and Browning do not find mention.

Long ago Sir John Lubbock tried his hand at much the same task. His list of the Hundred Best Books was taken as a guide by many in search of culture who spent evenings wrestling with translations of Sakuntala and the Agamemnon until, energy failing, they fell back on more familiar recreations. Those who are now to venture on the same enterprise with all the nations to help them, have explained that they do not confine their attention to the classics. Books published later than 1900, though not competitors for a place in the list of the best, will be considered for a supplementary list of the worth while. So authors and philosophers still at work are given their chance."

So far The STATESMAN. Evidently, we are in the realm of Comparative Literature. But

this game, as we have called it, is by no means valueless: in the same way as the counting of vocabulary for frequency word or idiom-lists, it serves worthy purposes and ends in the great cultural crisis through which our world is passing. Nobody, of course, will agree that no book written after 1900 is worthy to compete; on the contrary—but it is not the aim of this lecture to establish another "list of hundred books."

Another attempt to establish a selection "of the best" has arrived in December, 1949, from a firm in Calcutta, called "Standard Literature Company." Commercial selections, of course, are necessarily different from scientific ones; still it is interesting to look at them and to perceive the principles applied. Here, the editors present the "intellectual giants" in 4 volumes, entitled Man and Spirit, Man and Man, Man and the State, and Man and the Universe. Of ancient Indian literature, the Upanishads, the Bhagavat Gita, the Surangama Sutra and the Dhammapada are represented; in addition, we find not *books*, but authors with their best works, among them the Great Greeks and Romans, Confucious, Spinoza, Pascal, Hume, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietsche, Rousseau, R. W. Emerson, Bacon, Darwin, Einstein, etc., about 40 authors in all.

Our much needed *synthesis*, as we conceive it, or at least the work leading up to it, must draw some help from observation of related facts. If it could be proved conclusively that in all periods, when translation of foreign literature flourished, there was a great spiritual uplift at home, we

would do our best to further translation work; and by obtaining a better insight into such general conditions as make literature flourish, we should find ways and means to make literature profit from environmental conditions and the world around us from literature. We live in a biological age, which takes many things into its own hands, which before were left to the seemingly irregular play of the forces of nature. Although we have, so far, applied scientific breeding and improvement only to domestic animals and certain bacteria (mostly destructive), and have neglected to apply such knowledge as we have achieved to the systematic improvement of mankind, (a fact which is perhaps a surviving relic of "individualism"), there is no reason why, for instance, more prizes in literature should not be given, if the tenet finds acceptance that literature beautifies life; or why should not the learning of foreign languages be encouraged, if it can be proved that we can hang our own pictures more efficiently, if we know how they do it in France. We must avoid some popular fallacies, though, and carefully investigate before taking action. In other words, we have to know, why we are doing what we are doing. The very popular saying, that knowledge of our neighbour's language and civilization disposes towards peaceful intercourse, or, in other words, is a step towards preventing war, is certainly not true. In no country in the world was there so much learning of French as in Germany. Frederic the Great, who is internationally identified with the spectre of Prussian

militarism (while people neglect the fact that he was intellectually a genius and hated the Germans) spoke French as his mother tongue and used it as the chief language of conversation and as the language of official documents ; but this did not prevent the regular recurrence of fratricidal wars between France and Germany, ever since the successors of Charlemagne divided his empire. If someone should say, that the teaching of French in Germany did not succeed, because the French, on the other hand, did not bother much to learn German, we might agree, but this would lead to a new maxim that studies of language and literature must be reciprocal between two nations, if they should bring any beneficial political result.

This, of course, is only a hypothesis, which must be proved. The nations of India, for instance, understand each other very well and speak to a great extent each other's languages, but a surprising enmity flared up on partition signals being given, which, an outsider would have thought, ought to have been the signals for a general appeasement. If we attempt, then, to create the causes for producing desired effects, we shall meet with criticism from some side ; people will say that we are confounding cause and effect. It comes down to the seemingly irresolvable problem of how much of the goings-on on earth is attributable to individual leadership, and how much to the masses. I quote Prof. Gettel in his well-known Handbook of Political Science : "Just how much of political development is attributable to the spirit of the time that results from general causes, and how

much to the conscious effort of individuals, is one of the most difficult of problems; and historians have held widely divergent opinions concerning it. To some, all progress is the work of great men; to others, the individual is helpless unless the world is ready for him. As usual, the truth seems to lie between the extremes. Great individuals are both causes and effects. A Caesar or a Napoleon plays a mighty part, but at the same time conditions are such as to produce these men and make their work possible. Just as man may consciously modify the physical conditions of the external world, so may he influence those psychical bonds that create nations and states; and as the control of man over nature makes progress rapid in material civilization, so the conscious efforts of man to modify his political system makes possible the revolutions and reforms that mark the path of state development "—and, may I add here to the quotation, also of development in literature and the arts. Unless we know more about what's going on in the sea of gray cerebral matter, we can but compare the world's intellectual products and synthesize them, keeping carefully away from dry and monotonous levelling. And no matter how great the impact of common or state-fostered ideals may be, we must tirelessly strive to protect our individuality. To achieve a synthetic look at the world, does not mean to burn all books which do not contain the Koran—as Omar the Caliph said when he burned the library of Alexandria—or, for that matter, the Bible of a future remodeller of society.

In the course of our investigations, we also must not forget that we are not dealing with values uniformly fixed for all time. *Literature is something which varies:* this term meant to mankind a different thing at different times; it changes with the centuries, even with the decades. There were times when no books existed, and it is quite possible that future development will bring us a technique by which thoughts are stored up and subsequently transmitted to us by other means than the printed page. Various possibilities exist, too multifold for description and some too unimportant today to anyone except technicians, as contraptions like the "mechanical brain," where in mercury an incredible amount of information can be electrically stored. So far this machinery has been applied only to the solving of problems in mathematics, but there is no reason why it could not store myriads of literary works. Transmission to the "reader" could be by various means (accoustical, optical, etc.). Another practical foretaste of the latent technical possibilities is the *miniature book*, already in use in the great libraries of the western world: the pages of books are photocopied on microfilm, and shown to the reader through a quite simple enlargement apparatus, which rolls the film off at a speed which the reader can regulate with a lever. The saving of space is enormous: the whole of the treasures of the British Museum Library, where there are corridors extending for many miles, could be stored—if photographed on microfilm—in a small room, and with them a motor car could tour the country.

Moreover, they could easily be copied a hundred times and each library of size in the world be provided with a copy, so that the British Museum Library, and any other great library, with its printed and manuscript treasures, would come to practically anyone on earth (who had learned to read and had the necessary time to walk a few blocks to the "International Reading Room." After World War II, international library service was instituted, but scarcely worked. I am sure in this hall is not a single person who has not in vain tried repeatedly to get some books which he needed; to you all the advantages of this technical improvement will be evident. I do not know, whether India has any microfilm library yet, but if not, it is high time that she got one; if there are some millionaires here, who intend to spend their ready cash on scientific improvements—here is a worthy object to which they could apply themselves, that is, by providing microfilm libraries to all Indian universities and cities over a hundred thousand inhabitants. We might as well touch on a few other technical improvements in this review. There are "reading boxes," by which microfilms are turned, or real books slowly leafed over, and reflected on the ceiling in large letters, so that patients in the hospitals and homes, who are forced to lie on their backs for long stretches of time, can read without moving (the ceiling, of course, must be uniformly white for this purpose). I wonder in how many hospitals and clinics in India such facilities can be found. Industry in this country is developed

enough to produce this simple apparatus, the grand idea of which does not lie in the technical detail, but in the novel method of application.

But let alone the technical advances ; most of us, who read the scientific manuals, recreational literature and daily papers, certainly do not realize how the *meaning, which literature* has for us, changes *with the very meaning of our existence.* The weekly picture magazine " Life " some time ago carried an article describing how a professor of literature in New York tried to make this point with his students, by making them write a forecast of the development of the world in the next ten years, to be handed to him in sealed envelopes! After the lapse of these ten years (which is a rather unwieldy term for a course of study)—the class, diminished by death and defections, assembled again, and composed *ad hoc* an outlook into the next ten years: then the envelopes were opened and the two compositions compared, with the astonishing result, that almost everyone had assumed a quite different attitude towards his environment and the great problems of life. *Libri mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.* " *Books* change and we are changing with them." In its beginnings, the art of writing and reading was considered a mysterious power, reserved for the priestly class as one of their prerogatives. The very word *legere* (to read, in Latin, from which come the French *lire* and the German *lesen (auflesen)* originally meant to collect runic staffs thrown in an act of divination. There were periods in the European Middle Ages, when

the whole continent had little more to read than the Bible, and access to the Book of Books, as it was called then, was prohibited to the common people and possible only to those who knew Latin. For centuries later, reading and writing were considered to be some of the lower auxiliaries of administrative work; the high nobility often was illiterate by virtue of social status, and nobles had their reading and correspondence done for them by priestly or lay secretaries, in somewhat the same way in which the manager of a large industrial concern nowadays would keep a stenographer. The Great Mogul Akbar, the "Shadow of God on Earth," could not read. The modern world of literature was heralded in not so much by the invention of printing, which made possible the diffusion of education among the masses, but by the translation of the Bible by Luther; literature still remained for centuries a thing which the authorities liked better to fight and to suppress, than to protect and to enlarge; and less than a decade ago, the world still saw the wholesale burning of books by the Germans.

One of the most widely diffused religions of our days, Roman Catholicism, which has recently become a power in American politics, maintains a list, the so-called Index, of books, the reading of which is forbidden to the faithful. On this list can be found most great writers of mankind. Great political zones, as, for instance, the Soviet Union, maintain a hermetic closure against modern literature, so much so that no Soviet scientist could attempt to build a thesis on new literature provided

by the Western world. We must leave no doubt that a scientific comparison of the literary efforts of mankind cannot regard writing of books as something to be limited, to be subservient to religious restrictions, political systems, police regulations, the rules of the YMCA, the deliberations of the women's societies of America or the Book of the Month Club, or to be expurgated, filtered or watered down on moral grounds, or to be used as propaganda for the private ends of certain groups and classes. In a country, where students of literature, for the writing of a thesis, do not dare to touch anything more recent than Euripides, certainly the whole system is wrong.

No art or science can flourish unless at liberty to *choose its own subjects.* Literature can have no other meaning for us but as a repository of spirit, in which shall be treasured, and reflected to posterity, the sum total of our intellectual possibilities, the full measure of our inner life and the maximum of intellectual flight of which we are capable and neither can we neglect those facets of the huge crystal which reflect evil light ; sadism and cocainism, insanity and cruelty have the same standing as the Paradise in Faust II for one who measures artistic creation and it alone. Atheism or anarchism, shocking as they may sound to the bourgeois society of the past generation (but not to every society), have certainly their literary standing, which may be differently interpreted by holders of different tenets; we are not dealing here with virtues or vices *per se* ; we are dealing with their treatment

by authors, their existence in human imagination, the perfection of their description, and it is their sum total and synthesis we aim at.

Literature is not something *to be suppressed or to be exchanged* by supplanting one set of books by another, or, as politicians are seen doing, replacing certain languages by others. Incidentally, whenever war approaches and feelings of patriotism must be stirred, leaders are observed to state that the fighting will be for the preservation of one's mother tongue (besides, of course, fighting *pro aris et focis*, for "King and Country"). I have often felt it would be a nice piece of research to uncover the psychological roots which make war menace so efficient a weapon of language propaganda. Why are people so afraid that suddenly the use of another language may be introduced into the country? If a benevolent new ruler should administer the country in a new language, this would be, in their opinion, essentially worse than if the former ruler should order them about in their own tongue. But we are deviating from our subject. The aim of the true scientist must be, to preserve such knowledge of languages as are found on the spot, and to promote additional knowledge of foreign tongues. India already possesses a language which opens to her a window into the world—English, the language which comes nearest to being an international medium of understanding, as it spreads over almost all the civilized world, is understood—either spoken or printed—by almost one seventh of mankind, and has the richest

vocabulary of all languages, stemming both from Romanic and Germanic sources. In possession of this knowledge, which ought to be preserved and cherished, and her native languages (in affinity to both the Aryan realm and Asiatic regions), she is able to act as a crucible for the civilizations of Asia. Whatever is great in Asia —with perhaps the exception of historical movements on her outer fringes, as Mohammedanism and the idea of state worship in Japan (so badly and inhumanly realized),—has grown on Indian soil, and in Indian mentality. Like no other nation on earth, she has striven in the field of religion, philosophy and applied mental forces, and has reached peaks of perfection in mathematics, music, architecture, poetry. India has every possibility of winning again intellectual leadership, if all her great gifts are channelled into the right bed.

Only in a *blend of different cultures*, in a conscious and definite transgression of national limitations, and on individualistic ground can be found the advancement of mankind in this terrestrial age. Our understanding must reach out into the most remote spheres of intellectual achievements. And while comparative literature is a study necessarily far from mass movements and open only to the highly educated, it is still a wonderful means of furthering international co-operation, if carried on on the level of spirit, and can extend national literature far beyond its linguistic and political boundaries —nay, can create first the psychological conditions,

on which true *international literature and thought*, as Victor Hugo preconceived it, can grow. This must be the more distant aim of any teaching of comparative literature, and of any librarian who assembles books for this purpose.

I know that some of you will think me utopian. Indeed, things do not look too good at this moment. While the foremost scientific leaders of mankind warn us publicly, that the time has come when mankind must organize or perish through its own inventions, there is astonishingly little progress even in the basic cultural steps towards unified organisation. All nations stick to their outmoded spelling, though they know very well they should reform,—except a few happy ones like the Italians and the Spanish, whose spelling is almost phonetic. Some nations refuse steadfastly and with an energy worthy of better tasks, to accept Roman Script and the metric measure, and some persist even in the face of the decimal system and continue to divide their currency unit by 20, 12 or 16, on the same level as the Babylonians. There is almost no university without a department of economics, but money has become of doubtful value all over the planet. Everywhere are experts who advise the governments, but nobody pays heed. On the other hand, we observe some very encouraging growth : the World Postal Organization, which will carry our post-card for a few annas to the Marquesas, is certainly something splendid. The Red Cross and the IRO (International Refugee Organization) are beacons of hope. While I think little of the

possibilities for reformed languages as Ogden's "Basic English," or the "Model English" recently invented by Dr. Dodd in Seattle, I believe definitely that the irregularity of human thinking, which seems to necessitate the very use of irregular forms in language and grammar, is no obstacle to the growth of international thinking; and comparison of literature, in which are preserved our traditions, our advances and our intellectual freedom, can, by synthetic contemplation, work out a way to common ground, where the spirit will not wield destructive power.

The great, the crucial moments of mankind are preserved in literature, the flashlights on our soul, the turning points of the ages. When a word of the sage from Judaea, "Split the wood, and I will be found within," unknown hitherto, is found on a sherd in Syria; when, as Huysmans describes it, Gilles de Raiz stands before the judges, and "the white soul of the Middle Ages floats through the room"; when the last and true feelings of Marie Antoinette shine out in the mutilated correspondence with Count de Fersen (Zweig has done the research involved): when the Buddha, on his death bed, said: "Vayadhamma sankhara, apamadena sampadetati" (Transitory are the appearances; indefatigably ought you to persevere); then we know what we have in books.

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